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Sponsa verbi : the virgin
consecrated to Christ,
spiritual conferences

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SPONSA VERBI

THE VIRGIN CONSECRATED TO CHRIST

SPIRITUAL CONFERENCES

BY

The Right Rev. DOM. COLUMBA MARMION, O.S.B.
Abbot of Maredsous Abbey, 1858-1923

Translated from the French
by
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ALMAE DEIPARAE
VIRGINI SEMPER INTACTAE

EDITOR'S PREFACE

THESE pages resemble a wreath laid on a tomb, for Dom Columba Marmion gave up his soul to God on January 30th, 1923, in admirable sentiments of devotion and with utter abandonment to the divine mercy.

A biographical notice is in preparation which will reveal the main characteristics of theologian, monk and apostle combined in his taking personality.

The same spiritual doctrine will be found here, as was revealed in his previous works; teaching impregnated with a living theology, profound knowledge of scripture, penetrating piety, and a profound knowledge of souls. For souls he had a great passion. He gave himself entirely for them that they should be all for Christ.

But if his affection embraced all, like his Divine Master, he was specially attracted by two classes: the sinners, and those consecrated by vows of chastity. One day his zeal for his erring brethren will be known and with what tender compassion his eyes rested

on countenances seared with the leprosy of sin.

The following pages show to what heights of perfection he urged the spouses of Christ, who form, as it were, the élite of the flock of the Good Shepherd.

For purposes of health Dom Columba was ordered by the doctors to take some weeks of rest during the summer of 1918, at the time that the chronic trouble which gradually undermined his constitution began to manifest itself. He went into Luxembourg to recruit his strength, and there he enjoyed to the full the beauties of nature by which he was surrounded. As a companion for his long, solitary walks in the forests of the Ardennes, he took the Commentary of St. Bernard upon the "Canticle of Canticles." In spite of its length and digressions he was captivated by the subject: its sublimity, the abundant citations from Scripture, the enthusiasm of the holy Doctor narrating the examples of Divine Love: all these were well calculated to move a soul as supernaturally disposed as that of Dom Columba's. But more than the beauties of nature, more than the flowing style of the *Doctor Mellifluous*, Dom Marmion admired the marvels worked by God in these souls.

His lively and penetrating faith showed him

during the contemplation in which his reading plunged him, the marvellous condescension of the Word toward his privileged creatures : the theme of the Canticle itself.

Dom Columba generously communicated the spiritual lights he received to souls that were eager for them ; consequently, on his return he gave a series of conferences to the nuns at the Abbey of St. Scholastica at Maredret, commenting on a text of St. Bernard that had specially struck him ; in this passage the great Doctor indicates the conditions necessary for the soul aspiring to become the spouse of the Word.

Although these conferences were given to Benedictine Nuns, they are not specifically monastic ; there is hardly an allusion to the rule of the great Patriarch of the West.

Dom Marmion has outlined his subject in its widest and most exalted aspect, prescinding from any special rule or constitutions ; his theme being : The soul consecrated by the vows, becomes by virtue of that consecration the spouse of Christ.

Despite its title, there is nothing here that is essentially mystic in nature. However advanced the union which the Word wishes to contract with the dedicated soul, that union is derived essentially from the consecration and

the state of perfection which springs from it; there is no necessity that phenomena of an extraordinary nature shall be added to complete it.

The conferences we publish here were carefully collected and noted down by their hearers. We believe that these pages reproducing their delicacy of expression and depth of thought will be well received.

May their perusal by the virginal souls for whom they were intended arouse in them an ardent thanksgiving for the great graces they have received, for is it not a sublime privilege to have been chosen quite gratuitously by Christ to be espoused to Him? May these instructions, whilst they inspire gratitude, at the same time enkindle more intensely in souls the knowledge of their pre-eminent dignity, inspiring them in their daily efforts to attain the high perfection to which they are called.

This was surely the lofty aim which Dom Marmion had in view when he gave these conferences, and poured out into them his priestly and apostolic soul.

Before his death these conferences received his approbation, and now that they are published, we trust that they will prolong the beneficent and supernatural effects of his apostolate.

In attaining a larger circle of influence, may they reach not only the large number of Religious already consecrated to Christ, but also reveal to those still in the world the high ideal they inwardly aspire after.

EDITOR.

Maredsous Abbey,
October 15th, 1924.

I

THE CALL TO THE DIGNITY OF A SPOUSE OF CHRIST

SUMMARY.—The Consecrated Soul is invited by the Word to the dignity of Spouse—This teaching is based on Holy Scripture and the Liturgy—The amazingness of the divine condescension which is revealed has its source in Love—How St. Bernard draws the portrait of the Soul espoused to the Word.

The greatest gift made by God to the human creature is that of his supernatural adoption by grace into Jesus Christ the Word incarnate. The sovereign Being, infinite in all perfections who neither depends on or has need of anyone outside Himself, allows His immeasurable love so to flow over and permeate His creatures that they are elevated thereby to a participation of His Life and Felicity. This gift exceeds the demands, surpasses the powers of nature, makes man the child of his Heavenly Father, the brother of Christ, the temple of the Holy Ghost.

There exists, however, between God and the soul a deeper and more intimate relation than that derived from its quality of child; the soul is invited by the Word to the rank of spouse.

We have heard Christ more than once compare the Kingdom of Heaven to a nuptial banquet.[1] God through and by the Word calls souls to the banquet of divine union. At a great feast various categories of people are to be seen.

In the first place, we have *the servants*. These respect the master of the house, bear themselves fittingly in his presence, execute his orders, and in return are paid a fitting wage. If they acquit themselves well in their various duties they are esteemed; but they are not received at table, not admitted to intimacy, do not become sharers of their master's secrets. These are an image of those Christians who, guided habitually by servile fear, treat God as a Master, as some great Seigneur, and, like the servant in the Gospel, they find Him sometimes "hard";[2] they accomplish what they ought to do from fear of punishment. These souls who still live by "the spirit of bondage

[1] *Matt.* XXII, 1 sq.; XXV, 1 sq.; *Luke* XIV, 16 sq.
[2] *Matt.* XXV, 24.

in fear": "*Spiritus servitutis in timore*,"[1] have no intimacy with God.

Then there are *those invited, the friends*. The King has called them to his table, he speaks to them in a tone which betokens mutual friendship; he partakes with them of the banquet. However, there are degrees in this friendship. This is a picture of those Christians who love God without giving Him all; when they are present, He holds them in honour, but they are not always in the company of the Prince; they have to depart to see about their own affairs; their friendship is expressed in an intermittent fashion.

When the friends have departed, *the children* remain. They belong to the house, are at home and remain there. Bearing the same name as their Father, they are the heirs of His property; their life is one of honour, obedience and love given to their Father; they receive from Him in return, confidences which are not given to friends. These represent the souls who live and act as children of God, who realise perfectly those words of St. Paul: "Ye are no longer strangers and foreigners, but ye are fellow-citizens of the Saints, and members of the household of God: *Jam non estis hospites et advenae, sed estis cives*,

[1] *Rom.* VIII, 15.

sanctorum et domestici Dei."[1] They exercise the virtues of faith, hope and charity, the realisation of which issues in a spirit of complete abandonment to the good pleasure of their heavenly Father. " For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God " : *Quicumque Spiritu Dei aguntur, ii sunt filii Dei.*[2] To these souls who are His children, God gives himself as the Supreme Good which satisfies all their desires.

Finally, there is the *Spouse.* From her the husband has no secrets ; she shares with him the greatest intimacy of love ; there can be no more perfect union. The union contracted between them far surpasses in its nearness that between parent and child. Those who are espoused, said our Lord, " shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to one another " : *Dimittet homo patrem et matrem, et adhaerebit uxori suae,*[3] no union surpasses this in intimacy, tenderness and fecundity.

[1] *Eph.* II, 19.—Every soul in a state of grace is, without doubt, a child of God, but many Christians neither take notice of this divine reality, or seek to make it more vivid. They live and act only as if they were servants or friends. For a further development of this thought, see *Christ in His Mysteries,* Chapter XIX, § IV.

[2] *Rom.* VIII, 14.

[3] *Matt.* XIX, 5.

Now it is to contract an union of this sort that the Word invites the soul who is consecrated to Him by the vows of religion.[1]

You will reply at once: Is not every baptised soul in some measure espoused to the Word? That is true. It was not only to those consecrated by a vow of chastity that St. Paul wrote: "I have betrothed you to one husband, to present you a chaste virgin to Christ: *Despondi enim vos uni viro virginem castam exhibere Christo.*"[2] In baptism the soul freely[3] renounces Satan, his pomps, his works, the world and its maxims, to adhere to Jesus Christ and consecrate herself to His service. The grace of the Spirit of Love gives her to God, renders her worthy of the favours of the heavenly spouse, grants a right to those immeasurable joys of Heaven that

[1] However strange these expressions of bride and bridegroom, espousals and marriage may appear to those who are carnally minded, devoid of any spiritual sense, and ignorant of divine love, yet they are boldly and frequently employed by Holy Scripture, are so inseparable from dogma and catholic theology that they could not be passed over in silence or suppressed without profoundly mutilating the Christian religion itself. Mgr. Farges, *Les Phénomènes Mystiques*, p. 218.

[2] *II Cor.* XI, 2.

[3] Or the sponsors renounce for her until the soul is capable of ratifying her act deliberately.

Our Lord Himself has compared to those of a nuptial festival. How holy and sanctifying is the union of the baptised soul with Christ! Yet the union is much closer, the quality of spouse shines with a much greater brilliance in the case of the souls consecrated to God by the vows of religion. It is to these souls that in all verity can be applied the title of spouse of the Word; in them this sublime condition is realised in its plenitude. That union which by its profound intimacy imitates, though in an absolutely spiritual manner, the marriage union, does it not constitute the summit of the religious life? Ought not the soul to tend towards this union, by use of the many divine favours, by its generous and attentive efforts to remove all obstacles, and by using all means which lead to God? Can it not be said that the virgin consecrated to Christ will not have fully attained His ideal, will not have completely realised the thought of God in her regard, if she does not tend with all her strength towards this blessed state?

It is true that when the soul thinks of the infinite greatness of God, of His incomprehensible sanctity, and then considers her own misery and nothingness, she is seized with a sort of stupor at being the object of such a

wonderful privilege. She cries out: "Is it not presumption, is it not temerity and foolishness to dream of aspiring to a condition which surpasses that of all human desires? How can these things be? *Quomodo fiet istud?* [1]

Certainly had it not been for Revelation, such an elevated thought would not have been born in the human soul. But God Himself desires this union; He makes the advances; He invites the soul both by words and works.

Does not the Old Testament, despite the severities depicted there, which have given it the name of the law of fear, also picture in advance under the most exquisite forms the undreamt-of outpourings of the divine affections which mark the law of love?

The Divine Wisdom declared that "His delights are to be with the children of men." [2] "That He delighted playing each day in the world the work of His hands"; [3] astonishing terms when it is remembered that they refer to the intercourse of the eternal wisdom with man, and indicate something much higher than simple friendship.

Has not the Psalmist also celebrated in

[1] *Luke* I, 34.

[2] *Prov.* VIII, 31.

[3] *Ibid.*, 30.

poetical accents the royal union of the bride and bridegroom ?—" My heart hath uttered a good word : I speak my words to the King . . . . Thou art beautiful above the sons of men : grace is poured abroad in thy lips. . . . Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear ; and forget thy people, and thy father's house. And the King shall greatly desire thy beauty." [1] The " Canticle of Canticles," what is it but an epithalamium composed by the Holy Ghost to extol under the symbols of human love the union of the Word with the sacred Humanity, the union of Christ with the Church and with souls ?

But it is in the Gospels that the idea is expressed in all its plenitude ; there is its real source ; there it stands most clearly revealed. The Incarnate Word, unchangeable Truth, does He not give Himself to the spouse in person [2] in front of whom come the virgins destined to form His court ? [3] Is it not from His lips that the most prodigious invitation ever fell that could touch the human heart ? " All things are ready : come ye to the marriage " : *Omnia parata, venite ad nuptias.*[4]

[1] *Ps.* XLIV, 2, 3, 11, 12.
[2] *Matt.* IX, 15 and *John* III, 29.
[3] *Matt.* XXV, 1–13.
[4] *Matt.* XXII, 4.

Does not St. Paul, the herald *par excellence* of the mystery of Jesus, show us the Bridegroom " going to death in an excess of love " ; " preparing for His spouse the most beautiful jewels " ; " washing her in His blood so that she may appear before Him, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish ? " [1] worthy in truth of the " marriage of the Lamb " of which St. John sings in his Apocalypse. [2]

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church in her Liturgy has appropriated this thought. In the office of Virgins the intimate union between the Spouse and His bride are frequently mentioned. In the office of St. Agnes she puts into the mouth of the young martyr words full of a holy boldness. " My love is for Christ, for that Christ who will lead me into His nuptial chamber " *Amo Christum, in cujus thalamum introibo.*[3]

In the consecration of virgins, when the Bishop puts the ring on the finger he says,

[1] *Eph.* V, 25–27.—The text of the apostle applies, in the first instance, to the Church, but it can and should be extended with the same force to each soul, to whom Christ unites Himself in quality of spouse, by the religious consecration.

[2] *Apoc.* XIX, 7, 8 ; XXI, 2, 9.

[3] *Brev. monast.* III, ad matutin.

most explicitly, that he makes her "the spouse of Jesus Christ, Son of the Most High:" *Desponso te Jesu Christo Filio summi Patris. Accipe ergo annulum fidei . . . ut sponsa Dei voceris.*[1]

Without doubt we may say once again that we ought to dwell in a profound admiration for the thrice-holy God, yet at the same time we must never lose sight of the fact that Jesus Christ is the Sovereign Master of all things. "You call me Master and Lord, and you say well for so I am."[2] *Vocatis me Magister et Domine et bene dicitis, sum etenim.*" but this divine Master, this Lord before whom "the angelic powers, tremble," *tremunt postestates:*[3] a few moments before had so humbled Himself before these same disciples as to wash their feet. It is love again which has led Him to descend to the consecrated souls, to raise them to the ineffable dignity of spouse. This love plunges reason in astonishment, but faith lifts them to these heights. "We have known and have believed the charity which God hath to us":

[1] Roman Pontifical, *In benedictione et consecratione virginum.*

[2] *John* XIII, 13.

[3] *Praefatio Missae.*

Et nos cognovimus et credidimus caritati quam habet Deus in nobis.[1] Every soul vowed to God by the religious consecration is called to this position of spouse to the Word; she carries the title; if she is faithful, she enjoys the rights which are attached to it; she is loaded with marks of tenderness by her divine Spouse, and her union with Him becomes the source of a wonderful fecundity.

It was the habit of that great monk, St. Bernard, to talk to his cloistered brethren of the astonishing union which Jesus Christ deigned to contract with the souls dedicated to him, in terms which inspired them with his own piety; he himself had first entered into "the cellars of the King"[2] and to his monks who were eager for his teaching he gave of the abundant light which Incarnate Wisdom shed upon him. You know that his commentary upon the "Canticle of Canticles," although unfinished, is a series of eighty-six conferences which he gave at the Abbey of Clairvaux. In one of these the great Abbot traces with a master hand the portrait of the soul that is truly the spouse of Christ. Here are his words: "When you shall see a soul leave all things

[1] *I John*, IV, 16.

[2] *Cf. Cantic.* II, 4.

to adhere to the Word with all her strength, live by Him, allow herself to be guided by Him, conceive what she should bring forth by Him; a soul, in short, who can say: for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain, then you can indubitably recognise her for a spouse of the Word." *Quam videris animam, relictis omnibus, Verbo votis omnibus adhaerere, Verbo vivere, Verbo se regere, de Verbo concipere quod pariat Verbo; quae possit dicere: mihi vivere Christus est et mori lucrum: puta conjugem, Verboque maritatam.*[1]

Without doubt, in his commentary St. Bernard speaks more than once of mystic states properly so called, mystic espousals, spiritual marriage, extraordinary works of grace and of divine love to which God calls souls especially privileged. It is not, however, of these states, to which no one has the right by his own actions, that we speak here. Even though these lines borrowed from the great contemplative apply in the first place to the souls led by the Word to the summits of the mystic life, yet it is quite licit to use them to indicate the principal qualities, the essential duties of that soul who by religious profession becomes a consecrated spouse of Christ.

It is this beautiful text of St. Bernard's

[1] *In Cantic. sermo* LXXXV, 12.

which will serve as the theme for our conferences.[1] We shall comment on it with pleasure, being firmly persuaded that nothing can correspond more closely with the desires of Christ Himself. Is it not, moreover, by putting before your eyes the high excellence of your religious state, that you will grasp the importance of the duties it entails? Will not the contemplation of your high dignity inflame your hearts with a generous love for Him, who without your merit has predestined it for you? I shall essay, in the first place, to show you how the sacred Humanity of Jesus is espoused to the Word; for it is there that we shall find the best model of the intimate union that the soul contracts with Christ. I shall then tell you, taking the text of the holy Doctor, the necessary qualities for this union, the many means we have to maintain it, and the marvellous fruits of which it is the source.

May the Immaculate Virgin, from whose fruitful virginity was born the King of Kings, aid us in our task.

[1] Speaking directly to nuns, as St. Bernard formerly to his monks, Dom Marmion naturally limited the teaching of the Abbot of Clairvaux to consecrated nuns; this is why he more than once quotes texts from the Pontifical for the consecration of virgins. As a matter of fact, however, in its essential points this doctrine applies to *every* soul vowed to Christ.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

II.

THE HUMAN NATURE IN CHRIST, THE SPOUSE OF THE WORD.

SUMMARY.—In Christ the human nature perfectly realises those characteristics which St. Bernard demands for a Spouse of the Word—The human nature in Christ is devoid of personality—It is given up entirely to the Word—It lives only for Him—In entire dependence on Him—The wonderful fruitfulness of this divine union—This union is the model of the union of the Soul with the Word.

The fathers of the Church saw primarily in the "Canticle of Canticles," the symbol of that marvellous union which exists in Christ between the Word and the human nature.

The Word, the eternal Wisdom, is the Bridegroom; He chooses for Himself a spouse: a human nature. The immaculate and virginal womb of Mary is the nuptial chamber where this marvellous union was fashioned, a union so wonderful, so elevated, that it needed as artisan none other than the Holy Ghost Himself, so intimate that it is ratified by

substantial Love. But if we carefully observe the sacred Humanity in this union with the Word, we shall see that it marvellously and most fully realises those characteristics that St. Bernard wished to see in a spouse of the Word.

It can be said that the human nature in Jesus is absolutely free from self-seeking and any attachment to creatures: *relictis omnibus*.

That it is authentically human, you know; Jesus belonged entirely to our race, He was "perfect man" as well as "perfect God": *Perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*.[1]

The human nature in Christ is complete: an immortal soul united to a human body, with its faculties, senses, and powers of action" "In all things except sin, Christ was like unto His brethren": *Debuit per omnia fratribus similari . . . absque peccato*."[2]

However this humanity possessed nothing of its own, it had no personality in itself, it remained stript of that which in us is the inmost centre, the plenitude of autonomy[3]

[1] Creed attributed to St. Athanasius.

[2] *Hebr.* II, 17; IV, 15.

[3] This autonomy is evidently relative: for by essence every creature is finite, we depend upon God both for existence and for the conservation of our existence.

which constitutes the "me,"[1] the highest part of a rational being. There are two natures in Jesus, but only one person, the Divine Person of the Word, which replaces and supplies superabundantly for the human personality. Where shall we look for a human nature which was so radically, so absolutely despoiled? *Relictis omnibus.*

Having then nothing, belonging to nothing, the human nature in Jesus "adhered to the Word with all its powers": *Verba votis omnibus adhaerere.* The bond which united them cannot be expressed. Outside the ineffable union which unites the three Divine Persons in the essential unity of their nature, no union is closer, none more intimate than this. The sacred Humanity is truly *one* with the Word. If *one*, then all is common between them the actions of the human nature participate in the unique and splendid beauty which adorns the works of the eternal Wisdom; they acquire that transcendent worth, that infinite value which only attaches to the Works of God Himself. If *one* with the Word which has caused it, the human nature must be adored as divine. An indissoluble union: once realised, it ceases not; death itself did not break it, and in the ages

[1] Ontologically and juridically.

which will never finish, the elect will contemplate, admire, hymn and adore the humanity united to the Word.

What an absolute possession of the humanity by the Word, yet also what an absolute surrender of itself by the human nature, and in its free acts, what a transport of love towards the Word! Between the human nature and the Word, there was a perfect and unceasing community of thought, sentiments, will and action. All its life, all its activity, its very essence was consecrated to the glory of the Word, "lived for the Word": *Verbo vivere*. If the human nature holds from the Word, life, existence, the most sublime gifts, in return it gives itself up wholly to his operations. What Christ said of His life as Word with regard to the Father, the sacred humanity, keeping due proportion, can say of the Word. "My doctrine is not Mine"; [1] but His to whom I am united"; "I do not judge of myself, but according to the views of him who possesses me in Himself . . . I act as I see Him do [2]. . . .

The human nature in the hands of the Word is an absolutely submissive and perfect instrument; it is ruled by Him. *Verbo se*

[1] *John* VII, 16.
[2] Cf. *John* V, 19, 30.

regere. Having in the order of being no personality, it possesses none in the domain of activity. "The Word presides in everything, holds all in his hands . . . The man (the human nature) is elevated, but the Word is not limited in any way: unchangeable, unalterable, He rules always and everywhere the nature that is united to Him. From hence it comes that in Jesus Christ the human nature is in all things absolutely submissive to the direction of the Word, who so elevates all to Himself, that thoughts and actions are divine. All He thinks, all He wishes, all He says, all He hides within Himself, or manifests externally, are animated by the Word, guided by the Word, worthy of the Word.[1] . . ." The sacred humanity is for the Word, the channel of its graces, through it He appeared to men to reveal the divine secrets, to instil into hearts those words of wisdom, by which the eternal Goodness and unchangeable Love are manifested.

The dowry of that nature which possesses nothing of itself, is to give the Word life as man here below, so that He may conquer, draw souls to Himself and thus gain His kingdom. The sacred Humanity lives fully

[1] Bossuet, *Discours sur l'histoire universelle, 2e partie*, Chap. XIX, *Jesus Christ et sa doctrine*.

for the glory of the Word, in absolute dependence, but full of love until death, for by it the Word possesses what He could never find in the divine riches; a means by which to suffer, expiate and die for men. The human nature could say to the Word from the first moment of union with Him: "A bloody spouse thou art to me: *Sponsus sanguinum tu mihi es.*"[1] Delivered to Him, to execute with and in Him the will of the Father, the human nature did not cease during the whole of its earthly course to stretch forward to that "baptism of blood"[2] which consummated the marvellous and inexhaustible fecundity of that inexpressible union. It was actually by death that the Sacred Humanity "conceived of the Word what it should bring forth," *de Verbo concipere quod pariat Verbo.*

From death life issued, from the pierced heart of Jesus flowed that stream of living water which rejoices the city of souls, after having brought them forth by grace. The fruit of that union consummated on Calvary between the Word and the human nature, is the Church, that multitude of souls of which St. John speaks,[3] the elect "of every tribe,

[1] *Exod.* IV, 25.
[2] *Cf. Luke*, XII, 50.
[3] *Apoc.* VII, 9.

tongue, people and nation, redeemed "[1] by that blood to form for ever the resplendent and glorious Kingdom of the Bridegroom and Bride.

The marvellous artisan of all these works is love, the love of the Word for the human nature, the love of the Sacred Humanity for the Word. Their union is only realised by the Holy Spirit, substantial Love; it was love that made them meet in the womb of the Virgin, who "conceived by the Holy Ghost." Love commenced this union, consecrated and sealed it; Love preserved it, Love also consummated it. Christ, said St. Paul, "by the Holy Ghost offered Himself unspotted unto God."[2]

Such is to tell, in stammering fashion, the ineffable mystery of the divine nuptials of the Word with human nature. This mystery is at the same time, the model and source of the union of the Word with consecrated souls. The Incarnation, the hypostatic union, unique in its specific character, becomes universal by a mystic extension. The Christ, the God-man, the Incarnate Word, contracts with souls

[1] *Apoc.* V, 9.
[2] *Heb.* IX, 14.

in differing degrees that union which makes Him the Bridegroom and the soul the Bride.

The condition of the Bride is assuredly infinitely inferior to that of the human nature in Jesus ;[1] it is, however, so fruitful, that it ravishes and transports the souls who are its objects.

Oh, Lord Jesus, if the Psalmist can proclaim "that Thy friends are made exceedingly honourable," [2] what praises can fitly celebrate the infinite condescensions of your love towards those souls called to imitate your sacred humanity in the dignity of spouse ?

[1] The union of the Word with the human nature is substantial and personal ; the two natures being united in the unity of person. In the soul the union with the Word is by its nature accidental and moral, that is to say that the human being keeps its own personality in the domain of being ; the union with the Word is realised in its activity (knowledge, love and actions).

[2] *Ps.* CXXXVIII, 17.

III.

RELICTIS OMNIBUS.

SUMMARY.—Detachment from all creatures, the necessary preliminary condition for the soul which aspires to the dignity of Spouse of the Word. —Virginity is one of the principal means of this detachment—It is the object of one of the counsels, and constitutes a special grace—How necessary it is to preserve intact virginity of soul and body—This detachment can be perfectly reconciled with the precept of love for one's neighbour—It becomes a source of precious graces.

According to St. Paul, the union of the Word with the human nature is the image of the union of Christ with His Church. Beautiful as this subject is however, and useful for pious meditation, we shall not stop here, for the union of Jesus, with His Church as spouse is not realised in a definite and concrete fashion as is His union with souls.

It is, then, the union of the individual soul with the Word that we shall consider.

St. Bernard demands as the primary disposition for that soul which aspires to be a spouse of the Word "a detachment from all things," fully consented to and realised with a view to supernatural union: *Relictis omnibus*. It is the separation from all that could divide, all that could constitute an obstacle to perfect union.

In the parable of the "royal nuptials", our Lord Himself enumerates the principal obstacles which hinder souls from responding to the invitation of the King. "I have bought five yoke of oxen and I go to try them." *Juga boum emi quinque, et eo probare illa, habe me excusatum.* Here are the absorbing preoccupations of business affairs.—"I have bought a farm and I must needs go out and see it." *Villam emi et necesse habeo exire et videre illam.*" This is the vanity of ownership, joined with independence. "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." *Uxorem duxi et ideo non possum venire.*[1]

These are the ties and bonds of the flesh: examples of the three main obstacles which impede the soul from union with the King. Now these obstacles are removed by the vows.

We have seen elsewhere the part played

[1] *Luke* XIV, 18–20.

by the vows in the work of the soul's detachment.[1] Here we regard specially the obstacles which hinder the complete union of the soul with the Word, considered as Spouse. According to St. Paul,[2] this obstacle consists in dividing human love with Him, and is removed by the consecration of the virginity to God.

Fecundity is one of the Divine attributes; nay, it is the very life of God. For God to live "is to be the Trinity," to be fruitful in His own substance. Divinity and fecundity are, in a supreme sense, synonymous. Moreover, both are essentially actual. For God to live, is to be in Himself an act of fecundity, to be at the same time source and term of a fecundity always actual. The Father engenders the Son; the Father and the Son mutually communicate their love which is the Holy Spirit. Such is the plenitude of this infinite fruitfulness that it, as it were, exhausts the Divinity; God has but one Son equal to Himself in perfection, so equal that He is unique; so perfect that the Father, contemplating Him exclaims: "Thou

[1] *Christ, the Ideal of the Monk*, Conference II, *Following Christ;* VI, *The Religious Profession.*

[2] *I Cor.* VII, 33.

art my Son this day I have begotten Thee." *Filius meus es tu ; ego hodie genui te.*[1] There is but one Spirit, substantial love, which seals forever the union of Father and Son, and completes the intimate cycle of the Divine life. In giving being to man God grants him the power to imitate this paternity ; he gives fecundity to man. Moreover, racially considered, man has received from God the order to increase, for God having created the earth for man wishes that it shall be peopled with the fruits of human fecundity. " Increase and multiply and fill the earth." *Crescite et multiplicamini et replete terram.*[2] This fruitfulness is a reflection of the Divine fruitfulness. In the design of God, this was the last stage in the natural perfection of man ; even after the sin of Adam the human race preserves a superhuman grandeur, a primitive nobility radiating from it because there is a similitude to that fecundity " of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named." *Ex quo omnis paternitas in coelis et in terra nominatur.*[3]

Again we hear Eve exclaim as she takes her

[1] *Ps.* II, 7 ; *Heb.* I, 5 ; V, 5.

[2] *Gen.* I, 28.

[3] *Eph.* III, 15.

first-born son in her arms: "I have gotten a man through God." *Possedi hominem per Deum.*[1] A cry of joy and triumph, a feeble but faithful echo of the cry of God "in the brightness of the Saints": *In splendiborus sanctorum*[2] celebrating His eternal fecundity.

We understand now why St. Paul says in speaking of human marriage: "This is a great sacrament." *Sacramentum hoc magnum est.* But he immediately adds "but I speak in Christ and the Church." *Ego autem dico in Christo et in Ecclesia.*[3]

What does the Apostle wish to convey here? That the grandeur of this sacrament comes from the fact that it is a symbol of the union between Christ and the Church, that is, with souls. There exists, then, a union as intimate as that of marriage upon earth, but a higher reality, a more elevated state. And what is that? It is that in which, according to the expression borrowed from the Pontifical for the consecration of Virgins, "one does not imitate what is accomplished in earthly unions." *Nec imitarentur quod nuptiis agitur:* but where "one loves" there

[1] *Gen.* IV, 1.

[2] *Ps.* CIX, 3.

[3] *Eph.* V, 32.

is sought an intimacy and fecundity, profound but differing, which is typified in earthly marriage. *Sed diligerent quod nuptiis praenotatur.* There is the symbol and the shadow; here the profound and luminous reality. But religious virginity which prepares the way for this spiritual marriage is not the appanage of all: it constitutes a very special grace. Our Lord Himself said: "All men take not this word." *Non omnes capiunt verbum istud.*[1] In the preface for the consecration of virgins, which is of great antiquity, the Church celebrates in wonderful language the grandeur of that virginity that is consecrated to Christ. The obstacles opposed to this lofty state in the case of the soul united to a body of flesh are enumerated: "the law of nature, the free play of the senses, the force of hereditary tendencies, the stimulus of youth." Thus, it continues, only God can inspire a life of this sort. "It is you, O Lord, who inspired the soul with the love of holy virginity, who in your goodness nourishest this desire, rendering it capable of enduring." . . . . "The Virgin's Son, the Word incarnate, draws to Himself in the nuptial chamber in the quality of spouse those virgin

[1] *Matt.* XIX, 11.

souls, who like Him are emulous of angelic purity."[1]

According to St. Bernard this virginal state is necessary for that soul which aspires to an intimate and perfect union with the Word.

What does St. Paul say in speaking to the virgins? "I would have you to be without solicitude, for he that is with a wife is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife," and the consequence is, "he is divided." *Et divisus est.* On the other hand, "He that is without a wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord." He does not seek to please himself, his love and all his heart is totally given to God." "The virgin has time to attend upon the Lord without impediment."[2] The vow of virginity, then, marks the absolute separation from any creature, which is a necessary requisite for that soul which desires to be united with the Word as spouse.

On the day of your religious profession, you fulfilled this condition; then it was that you

[1] *Agnovit auctorem suum beata virginitas et aemula integritatis angelicae, illius thalamo, illius cubiculo se devovit, qui sic perpetuae virginitatis est sponsus, quemadmodum perpetuae virginitatis est filius.*"—Roman Pontifical.

[2] *I Cor.* VII, 32–35.

not only said good-bye to that home in which you were born and nurtured, but freely responding to the divine call, you renounced of your own free will all earthly union, and the legitimate right to found a family : you became detached from all things : you then realised the most complete abandonment even of yourselves, *relictis omnibus*, so that you might consecrate yourself, soul and body, to the Word. This complete donation of yourself, inspired and realised by the help of grace, is the great subject of your interior joy. It should also be a constant source of thanksgiving. For does it not confer upon you the magnificent faculty " of consecrating yourself without impediment to a life of intimate union with God " ? *Eo quod facultatem praebeat sine impedimento Dominum obsecrandi*.[1]

Does it not place you always in " the garden enclosed " : [2] there to enjoy the gifts and presence of the Bridegroom ?

[1] *Ibid.* 35.—According to St. Augustine who is followed here by St. Thomas, to merit the praises of virginity it is not sufficient only to have kept corporal integrity, but this must have been kept in order to consecrate it to God : " *Nec nos hoc in virginibus praedicamus quod virgines sunt, sed quod Deo dictatae, pia continentia virgines sunt.—De virginit*, c. 8. Cf. *Summa theolog.*, II–II, q. CLII, a 1 and 3.

[2] *Cantic.* IV, 12.

Does it not make the soul the "fountain sealed"[1] where the living and fructifying waters are?

It is most important however, never to take back what we have once given so generously. Our souls and bodies being consecrated to God, we must take the greatest care to keep from the avenues of approach to our hearts, not only anything that might soil their purity, but all that has the slightest tendency to lessen or weaken the intimacy of the soul with Christ.

In the Preface from which I have already quoted, the Church asks God "to confirm by the seal of His blessing" that soul which is all for Him, demanding that she who has become the spouse of Christ "shall be enlightened and sustained by His support." And why this demand? Because "the higher the aims the more carefully concealed are the ambushes of the ancient enemy, who, through the negligence of the soul insinuates himself to dim the lustre of perfect virginity."[2]

It is only by extreme vigilance in avoiding

[1] *Cantic.* IV, 12.

[2] *Da protectionis tuae munimen et regimen, ne hostis antiquus, qui excellentiora studia subtilioribus infestat insidiis, ad obscurandam perfectae continentiae palmam per aliquam mentis serpat incuriam.*—Roman Pontifical.

the slightest occasion of imperfection, by cutting short immediately evil suggestions or unhealthy reveries, that we are able to preserve pure and immaculate so sublime a state. This viligance must be always active; our resolution must never falter. A virginal heart which does not protect itself by the guard of the senses and mortification runs great risks, especially if, through imprudence, it exposes itself to dangers. "Do not neglect the little faults, for by these the great commence, the conflagration which burns all before it springs often from a tiny spark." [1]

Pride is often encountered as the root of this negligence. For to expose oneself to danger is equivalent to saying: "I can be chaste by myself." But such a condition, to live virginally in corruptible flesh, is not a triumph of ours, but that of grace.

Virginity is a gift of God's.[2] Its delicate splendour is only maintained in us by heavenly power; and, above all, it is to humble hearts

[1] Bossuet, *Sermon pour une profession.* Œuvres oratoires. Ed. Lebarq, III. p. 533.

[1] "All men take not this word, but those to whom it is given." *Matt.* XIX, 11–12. See also the "Preface for the Consecration of Virgins": *Inter caeteras virtutes quas filiis tuis indidisti* hoc donum (*virginitatis*) *in quasdam mentes* de largitatis tuae fonte *defluxit.*

that God gives this grace. There is a profound supernatural affinity uniting humility and virginity.[1]

Let us then watch humbly over ourselves, never permitting any creature to break into the integrity of our love. The sacred veil with which the Church covers the head of the virgin on the day of her consecration, is it not the sign of the exclusive love which the Bridegroom demands of her? "He has placed His sign on my forehead, so that I shall admit no other love than His." *Posuit signum in faciem meum, ut nullum praeter eum amatorem admittam.*[2]

Without doubt this love cannot and should not be so exclusive as not to extend to all creatures seen in a divine light: we ought to

[1] St. Augustine emphasises the necessity of humility for virginal souls. Citing the words of Scripture: "Abase thyself the more profoundly thou art elevated, and thou wilt find grace in God's eyes," he then continues: "Since perpetual continence and, above all, virginity consecrated to Christ, constitutes amongst the Saints of God a gift beyond price, it is necessary to use the most attentive vigilance lest pride should endanger this precious gift." *De Sancta Virginitate*, Chap. XXIII, n. 33. *Cf.* Chap. XXVIII, n. 39; Chap. XXXI *et seq.*

[2] Roman Pontifical.

love our neighbour, not as an abstraction, but as he presents himself to us in reality. We have noted elsewhere the extent of the precept of fraternal charity.[1] Above all, it is in the Saints, that is to say, in souls completely detached, that one finds an unequalled fraternal love.

Take, for instance, St. Bernard. We all know how free he was from any attachment to creatures, and how united to God. If he placed detachment as a primary necessity to attain divine union, it was because he had realised in his own soul this total abandonment. But did he not write to the monk Robert, whom he loved above all, and who had left Clairvaux for Cluny: "How unhappy I am to have you no longer, not to see you, to have to live without you! To die for you is my life, to live without you is to die."[2]

Do we not see him the day after the death of his brother Gerard, after he had presided at his funeral without shedding a tear, suddenly break down in the Chapter House during his commentary on the Canticle of Canticles, to give vent before all to his pent-up emotion?

[1] *Christ the Life of the Soul.* Conference, *Love One Another.* See also, *Le Christ Idéal du Moine*, pp. 536–538.

[2] P.L. t. 182, *Epist.* I, n. 1.

What pathetic accents we hear. "My grief became more violent the more I restrained it. I acknowledge that I am conquered. The sorrow I feel within must burst forth . . . . O Gerard, my brother by nature, and even more by religion, you were so much to me. Why have you been thus torn away? We who loved so tenderly, how can it be that death shall separate us? We were one heart, one soul, the sword of death in transfixing his soul has equally transfixed mine[1] . . ." The whole discourse is a cry of tenderness, exhaling itself from the most intimate depths of his soul.

So loved St. Bernard: in like manner loved St. Anselm and St. Teresa. In fact, the Saints always loved thus. The purity of their love was the secret both of its depth and its tenderness.

Let us then seek to give the Bridegroom the love He claims, mindful that He converted into a commandment the precept to love one another as He has loved us Himself, and also made it the object of His last prayer.[2] Yet divine love is a jealous love: for the celestial

[1] In *Cantic.* XXVI.

[2] *John* XIII, 34; XV, 12; XVII, 21–22.

Spouse demands the complete love of the soul that is consecrated to Him.[1]

He claims—and what right is more sovereign than His ?—that first and foremost it shall be His entirely without reserve, division or adherence to any other person or thing ; we must live in complete abandonment, absolute detachment. "*Relictis omnibus.*"[2] These words contain depths which can only be sounded in prayer ; they suppose a poverty so radical that they have dismayed more than one soul.

In reality there is no subject where we may so readily be deceived ; all of us have some attachments. But we ought to be able to look Christ in the face and say to Him : " My divine Master, You are my God and my all. I seek only You, You alone." Happy the soul that can pronounce such words with sincerity : Our Lord will reply to her with infinite tenderness, the gage of more intimate blessings : " I am also entirely yours."

[1] This priority is encroached upon when affection for a creature is too natural or too sensible ; when it occupies the mind too incessantly ; above all, at the time of prayer, when it troubles the soul, or is the source of infidelities to the Rule ; or again, if it unnecessarily excludes people from its affections.

[2] *Cf.* St. Mechtilde, *Le Livre de la Grâce Spéciale*, IV. *partie*, Chap. LIX.

The life of St. Gertrude gives us an example of this absolute detachment from creatures. You are aware that her reputation for sanctity was so great that people came from all parts to consult her. Through charity the Saint responded to these frequent appeals. "For the least demand she interrupted her own employments; prodigally bestowing both time and patience, she willingly welcomed those who came to her sometimes from great distances for help and consolation. During these interviews, however, she could not help longing for the time when she could return to her Best Beloved. These exterior relations were for her a veritable cross; and if she had not known that by these communications with the world she aided in increasing the glory of God, nothing could have induced her to engage in them.

"Occasionally, carried away by her desire, she would suddenly rise and go to the choir. 'See, my dear Lord,' she exclaimed, 'how wearied I am with this intercourse with creatures. Were I free to choose, I would have no other society, no other conversation than yours; with joy I would abandon all, and return to you my supreme Good, the only joy of my heart and my soul.' Then seizing her crucifix, she kissed five times each of the wounds of

Christ, saying : ' I greet you O my Spouse, full of grace and sweetness in the joy of your divinity ; I embrace you with the love of the whole Universe, and lay an ardent kiss on the wounds of your love.' This practice of devotion took but a few seconds, yet Our Lord revealed to her how these marks of devotion touched His Sacred Heart ; and for each one of them He would one day reward her a hundredfold. Thus, these frequent visits of seculars which might have been a peril resulted in plunging the Saint more deeply into her mystic union. ' Nothing pleases me here below save You O my Lord,' she said, and Christ, as it were, borrowing the phrases of His faithful servant replied in words full of tenderness : ' And I without you find pleasure neither in heaven or earth—for in my love I associate you with all the joys and happiness that I taste. Moreover, the greater these joys the greater the fruit you draw from them.'"[1]

[1] D. G. Dolan. *Sainte Gertrude, sa Vie Intérieure*, pp. 110, 111.

IV.

VOTIS OMNIBUS VERBO ADHAERERE.

SUMMARY.—Charity must be joined to Virginity, for Love is the Bond of Union—The Virgin must attach herself to the Spouse with all her Powers—This Attachment is realised by Fidelity—The importance of this Fidelity—The "Little Foxes" which ravage the Bridegroom's Vineyard—The Blessings brought by Fidelity.

To become the spouse of Our Lord it is not sufficient to have only virginity of soul and body. Has not Our Lord Himself said that amongst the ten virgins, five were excluded from the nuptial ceremony? Yet they were virginal souls. What was wanting then? The oil necessary to keep their lamps burning.

According to the usual interpretation of the Fathers of the Church, oil here symbolises charity. Charity was wanting to the foolish virgins; it was the sole cause of their exclusion: an absolutely compelling reason, however. For is not charity, as a matter of fact, that

which crowns all the other virtues and without which they are nothing worth ?

Listen to St. Paul : " If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing : *nihil mihi prodest*.[1] If these extraordinary gifts, these eminent works are worth nothing devoid of charity, the same applies to virginity which is separated from love : excellent though it may be in itself, it is without value in the eyes of the Bridegroom and the door remains shut to it : " Amen, I know you not." *Nescio vos*.[2]

Charity, love, is then absolutely essential for that soul who wishes to be admitted to the rank of spouse ; it is the very bond of union. St. Bernard defines this love as " to adhere to the Word with all her power, to live for Him, to be ruled by Him." Such are the

[1] *I Cor.* XIII, 1–3.

[2] *Matt.* XXV, 12.

necessary duties incumbent upon such an eminent dignity; but they are even more incumbent for those ascending degrees, which lead to more perfect and more fruitful union.[1]

To have the rank of spouse the soul ought "with all its strength to adhere to the Word." *Votis omnibus Verbo adhaerere;* it should be able to say truthfully with the Psalmist: "It is good for me to adhere to my God" *Mihi autem adhaerere Deo bonum est.*[2] If "man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife", so the bride in the same manner attaches herself to her spouse. *Et adhaerebit uxori suae.*[3]

What is it to be united to the Spouse? It is to follow Him everywhere and always,

[1] "The immortal Bridegroom, for whom virginity prepares you, has two wonderful qualities. He is infinitely separated from all by the purity of His being; He is infinitely communicative by reason of His goodness. Christian virginity, then, consists in a holy separation and a chaste union. This separation constitutes its purity; the chaste and holy union is the cause of the spiritual delights which grace makes abound in the truly virginal soul." Bossuet, *Sermon sur la Virginité. Œuvres oratoires.* Edit. Lebarq, t. IV, p. 473 and 475. All this wonderful sermon should be read. *Sermon for a Profession, Ibid.* t. III, pp. 521 sq.

[2] *Ps.* LXXII, 28.

[3] *Gen.* II, 24; *Matt.* XIX, 5.

to have the same thoughts, the same interests, to share the same labours, to be associated in the same destiny. One word completely sums up all these duties : fidelity.

St. Paul asseverates this truth, and the Church in the Pontifical for the consecration of virgins expresses several times the same thought.[1]

Does not this refer to some promise to be kept ; some contract maintained ? But what promise has the chaste soul of the religious made ? That of the vows. That is why fidelity to vows is of such supreme importance in the life of a soul consecrated to God. Every transgression of these solemn promises hinders the life of union with the Spouse.

It is " with all our powers," *votis omnibus*, that we must by fidelity safeguard our "adhesion to the Word," the Spouse of the soul.

This fidelity must be universal ; with regard to the Spouse, it must extend to all that relates to His person, His rights, His interests, and His glory ; on the part of the soul it should touch all the faculties ; ennoble every act for the whole of life. Nothing should escape this fidelity, nothing diminish or injure it.

[1] *Si [Christo] fideliter servieris, in perpetuum coroneris ; propositum teneas ; fidem integram, fidelitatemque sinceram teneat, etc.*

Free from every scruple, it must be constant in its fidelity. The soul must be united to the Beloved, not only during the hours of joy, but also during those hours of darkness when it seems as if abandoned by the Spouse, when in desolation "it seeks Him whom the soul loves and finds Him not." *In lectulo meo per noctes quaesivi quem diligit anima mea et non inveni.*[1] "It calls and He answers not." *Vocavi et non respondit mihi.*[2]

This continuous and constant fidelity, even in the smallest things is of the greatest importance; the perfection and fruitfulness of the union are dependent upon it. This fidelity to the Spouse in the slightest details pleases the Word: he speaks of this in the Canticle: "Thou hast wounded my heart, my spouse with one hair of thy neck." *In uno crine colli tui.*[3]

You know also that other text in the Canticle: "Catch us the little foxes that destroy the vines: for our vineyard hath flourished." *Capite nobis vulpes parvulas quae demoliuntur vineas; nam vinea nostra fluorit.*[4] These are the words of the spouse, who, full of love,

[1] *Cantic.* III, 1.
[2] *Ibid.* V, 6.
[3] *Ibid.* IV, 9.
[4] *Ibid.* II, 15.

thinks of the dangers which menace the vine planted by the Beloved, and committed to her care. The spouse is troubled about "the little foxes"; they are *parvuli*, that is scarcely to be seen; but the spouse knows that they ravage the vineyard; but as the interests of the Bridegroom are hers, she speaks of "our vineyard," and is it surprising that she should be preoccupied about them?

What is this vine, and what are these noxious little beasts? The vine is the soul itself, the consecrated soul; Our Lord has planted it, or rather, "we are the branches" of that divine vine which is "He Himself." *Ego sum vitis, vos palmites.*[1] Chosen branches, has He not loved you with a love of preference? Are you not chosen "before many others": *prae consortibus tuis*,[2] to be called to intimate union with Him? It is in speaking of you that God could say: "Here is the vine of my love." *Vinea electa*:[3] "I have acquired it with my blood, I have surrounded it with a wall to protect it, I have placed it close to the well of living water, to fructify the earth which bears it"—the Sacraments, those unfailing founts of light and grace. "What is there

[1] *John* XV, 5.
[2] *Ps.* XLIV, 8.
[3] Cf. *Isaiah* V, 2.

that I ought to do more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it? *Quid est quod debui ultra facere vineae et non feci ei . . . .?*[1]

Consequently from this vine, cultivated with so much care, Christ justly demands a rich harvest: "In this is my Father glorified that you bring forth much fruit." *In hoc clarificatus est Pater meus ut fructum plurimum afferatis.*[2]

The unique preoccupation of Jesus is the glory of His Father; and He has a right to expect of the souls whom He has chosen to be His spouses, that they shall also be enkindled with zeal for the glory of the Father; in consequence, rich in good works and fruits of sanctity.

But how is it that souls so privileged as these, the objects of such delicate attention, vegetate, as it were, and do not arrive at that high degree of intimate union with the Spouse, that should render them fruitful? What is it that hinders the vine from bearing that abundance of fruit which would delight the heart of the Spouse? These ravages are caused by the *vulpes parvulae*. These foxes are small, not in their cunning and the harm they do, but only in appearance; in reality, their ravages are great, and the

[1] *Isaiah*. V, 4.
[2] *John* XV, 8.

attentive husbandman fears them. What do these animals signify, which ravage the vine when it is in flower, and prevent it bearing fruits for the well-beloved ?

Are these imperfections of body or soul ? No, all the Saints have known these faults and frailties ; all have experienced the weight of the body, the strife against the spirit, the tendencies of fallen nature, the effects of sin, of heredity, of temperament, of education. The Bridegroom desired to unite Himself to a soul that was feeble, that stumbled, that failed by surprise, because He is Infinite Mercy and Love, and because, far from these faults separating us from Him, our helplessness and our misery attract Him. It is that He has come to cure.

Still, nothing is more certain than that Our Lord will never give Himself intimately to an unfaithful soul. It is these infidelities which ravage the vineyard. These faults can be, and usually are, " small " (*parvulae*) but they are to be feared when they are either habitual or deliberate. To admit carelessness in exercises of piety, break the silence without necessity, disobey willingly and without concern the smallest point of the Rule, take no notice of established usages, even small and trivial ones, under pretext of largeness of view,

waste time futilely, linger over imprudent thoughts, be knowingly lacking in charity, criticise orders or actions of superiors: all such acts impair fidelity, and enfeeble the life of union. If these infidelities, often repeated and renewed, become habitual what may happen? Then the graces given in abundance profit but little, the intimacy of the soul with Christ diminishes, the action of the Holy Spirit becomes less, progress is practically at a standstill, and the interior life gravely compromised. Moreover, how can the intimacy with Our Lord be enjoyed, the effects of His love be experienced, if love for Him is lacking the whole day through? The virgin who constantly and regularly does not close the entrance of the vineyard to these "little foxes" is not a true spouse, for these infidelities deeply wound our Lord. Surely, to such a soul can be applied the words of God lamenting over the children of Israel, which He compares to a vine carefully cultivated by Him but which has not responded to the divine efforts: "I looked to my vineyard that it should bring forth grapes, and it hath brought forth wild grapes." *Expectavi ut faceret uvas, et fecit labruscas.*[1]

Is it not also amongst those that are intimate

[1] *Isaiah* V, 4.

that coldnesses are most felt, and that they rapidly assume the aspect of deliberate offence? The soul, then, that is dedicated to Christ must follow the Spouse, and serve Him with all attention and the strictest fidelity; this fidelity manifests itself expecially in a constancy to avoid those little failings which could displease the Word.

Let us show, then, in safeguarding our fidelity, a great generosity. Fidelity of this sort costs, and will continue to cost nature much.

But did the Bridegroom shrink when His Father indicated to Him the cross as the means of redeeming our souls and paying for the jewels that should adorn them for all eternity?

Can we then be united to such a Spouse and not be desirous of taking our share in abnegations and sufferings? All should be in common between the Spouse and His bride, and a soul which desires the joys of union without sharing the same life of denial and suffering is not worthy of such a high vocation. She closes for herself, in addition, the door to many graces, for fidelity is often the reason that moves God to bestow His graces. If many consecrated souls do not arrive at the degree of union to which the Spouse calls

them, it is because they have constantly hindered in themselves the action of His Spirit.

If now we perceive in our life some infidelity which hinders us from giving ourselves entirely to the Word, let us take the resolution to put an end to it. Placing ourselves at the foot of the Crucifix, let us say: "Jesus my Saviour, I love you; I desire to prove this love, to glorify your Father with you; I promise to watch that nothing may come to ravage your vine, to hinder the work of your love. From all eternity you have regarded this vine with special dilection; you planted it on the day of baptism; you chose it before others in a special manner to belong to you by virginal consecration; you have watered it with your precious blood; each day you have nourished it with your adorable flesh; for love of you I desire that you shall find in me abundant fruit, both to rejoice your heart and glorify your Father."

Let us not be discouraged by the remembrance of past infidelities or the thought of possible failures in the future; the latter spring from our nature, and can be perfectly reconciled with goodwill; the former should be the occasion for us to humble ourselves and incite us to greater generosity.

By degrees, little by little, as St. Benedict tells us, in the measure that we advance in fidelity—*processu conversationis* [1] the soul will abound in light, every day the heart responding more intensely to the action of the Spirit of love "will run in the way of perfection with an incredible sweetness of love." Thus Charity strengthens union, the bonds are tightened, adhesion to the word becomes more stable, stronger, more joyous, until it reaches the stage of permanency. The soul will then experience the truth of those magnificent words of the Apostle: "Who shall then separate me from the love of Christ, my Spouse? Shall tribulation, or distress, or famine, or nakedness, or persecution, or the sword?" [2] No, nothing is capable of separating the faithful virgin from her Beloved, like the spouse in the Canticle she repeats unceasingly: "Draw me, we will run after Thee to the odour of Thy ointments": [3] *Trahe me post te curremus in odorem unguentorum tuorum"*; and again: "Put me as a seal upon Thy heart, for my love and my fidelity are strong as death, many waters cannot drown them"; *Aquae multae non*

[1] Holy Rule *Prologue.*
[2] *Rom.* VIII 35.
[3] *Cant.* I, 3.

potuerunt exstinguere caritatem nec flumina obruent illam[1] "For I am sure that neither death with its horrors, nor life with its seductions, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any creature can separate her"[2] from her Lord and Spouse. Of her it may be said here below: "That she follows the Lamb whithersoever He goeth":[3] *Quocumque ierit.* It follows "that she who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him": "*Qui adhaeret Domino unus Spiritus est*"[4]

Oh, what condition more blessed than that of the faithful soul! What state more enviable than that of the virgin always attentive for the least signs of the approach of her Spouse! Finding her with her light burning, the Spouse "will lead her into the hall of the marriage feast" and will bestow richly upon her those delights which neither speech nor pen can describe: *Intravit CUM EO ad nuptias.*[5]

[1] *Cantic.* VIII, 6, 7.
[2] Cf. *Rom.* VIII, 38, 39.
[3] *Apoc.* XIV, 4.
[4] *I Cor.* VI, 17.
[5] Cf. *Matt.* XXV, 10.

V

VERBO VIVERE, VERBO SE REGERE

SUMMARY.—The third quality of the Spouse: "to live for the Word," this life is summed up in the word "Fervour"—Love is the support of this life—The "Reign of the Word" in the soul: its universal character—The resulting fruits for the Spouse.

A fidelity which is constant and all-embracing necessarily enables the soul "to live for the Word": *Verbo vivere.* This is the third virtue necessary for the spouse.

What does "to live" mean as applied to the soul? The soul lives by the movement and exercise of its faculties. She "lives for the Word" when she does not concern herself, nor act save for the interests and glory of her Spouse; when she applies her memory, imagination, intelligence, heart, will, all her powers, all her activity in the service of the Word, to know him better, love him more, and also to make him better known and loved by others. The soul who lives only for the

Spouse does not seek her own satisfaction in anything, nor her personal interest; she seeks solely the good pleasure and glory of her Lord and Master.

In a spiritual manner she is jealous for the honour of her Spouse; the acts of betrayal, infidelity, the injuries inflicted by so many souls wound her, and stimulate her ardour and generosity: *Defectio tenuit me, pro peccatoribus derelinquentibus legem tuam.*[1] She gives herself wholly, gives all she possesses that the Spouse may be honoured, exalted, loved. She makes her own that prayer of Our Lord, "Father, glorify Thy Son"[2] she employs herself without ceasing to realise this glorification, first in herself, then in others. Devotion, properly speaking, is that prompt, cheerful, tranquil movement of the generous soul, which causes her to forget herself in the interests of her Spouse and those of His Church.

But in this aspect what is the mainspring which, as it were, both animates and stimulates her? It is love.[3] Love, the master of the will, possesses all the roads leading to the

[1] *Ps.* CXVIII, 53.

[2] *John* XVII, 1.

[3] *Cf. In Christ the Ideal of the Monk*, Chap. VII, pp. 183–187; exterior observance ought to be animated by love.

heart, all the powers of the soul, all the springs of its activity. Given up to love, the soul has nothing of its own, lives no longer for itself, but entirely for its Well-Beloved. "What is love if it is not to have always and everywhere the same will, eliminating absolutely the slightest contrary desire, thus effecting a total subjugation of the heart?"[1] Such a love transforms, makes the soul like to its Spouse. Listen to St. Bernard, from whom we have borrowed the theme of our conference, whilst he tells of the astonishing grandeur of this union: "Such a conformity with the divine will marries the soul with the Word, to which it is similar in its spiritual nature, for loving Him as it is loved by Him, it is now similar in Will. What can be sweeter than this conformity of wills? What more desirable than this love, which renders the soul discontented with the teachings of man, makes her approach the Word with confidence, rest united to Him, remain contentedly near Him, and consult Him in all things, being as eager to know as her intelligence makes her capable of knowing. This contract of marriage is truly holy, truly spiritual; but the term contract is not sufficiently expressive; it is a

[1] Bossuet, *Méditations sur l'Évangile. LI* Jour. Ed. Marbeau, p. 284.

commingling, a veritable embrace, such an identification of wills that the two make but one."[1]

The entire conformity of view, of feelings, of wills that St. Bernard depicts here, is only possible inasmuch as the soul allows herself in all things "to be conducted by the Word": *Verbo se regere.*

More even than "the eyes of the servant are on the hands of her mistress,"[2] to know her orders and execute them, the true spouse of Christ feels herself interiorly compelled to turn a glance of love upon her Spouse to find out the indications of His will. In this manner she continuously contemplates the sacred person of Jesus, in the various stages of His life and in His mysteries.

Above all, in this contemplation she loves to dwell upon "the mountain of myrrh"[3] that is, the foot of the Cross, because by His blood the Spouse conquered her. Her joy is to traverse again in thought the life of the Word. She regards Him in the bosom of the Father, in the immaculate womb of the Virgin, where He became incarnate, in the

[1] In *Cantica*, sermo LXXXIII.
[2] *Ps.* CXXII, 2.
[3] *Cantic.* IV, 6.

crib at Bethlehem, in the workshop at Nazareth, follows Him to the desert, on the roads of Judea, enters with Him the Temple and the synagogues. Accompanies Him to Bethany, to the last supper, the Garden of Olives, the Pretorium and Golgotha; she dwells with Him on Calvary, sharing the pains and humiliations of her bleeding Spouse. With Magdalen on the morning of the Resurrection, she recognises in Him the "Rabboni" and adores. Receives His divine benediction the day of the Ascension, and at Pentecost the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Everywhere it is the same Word, the Lord and Master, Friend and Spouse that she seeks, in order to discover the secrets of His works, the sentiments of His soul, to measure "with eyes illuminated with love, the breadth and length and height and depth of the mystery of His love.[1] Lovingly she scrutinises all His actions that they may become the models for her own, re-reads His words that they may be springs of wisdom and light; judges all things in the clearness of the Gospel. What Christ loved she loves, what He hated—sin—she hates, says "Amen" to all that He reveals, and "*fiat*" to all that He commands or permits.

"The Spouse," says St. Bernard, "loves

[1] Cf. *Eph.* I, 18; III, 18.

ardently, but being so beloved, to herself she seems to love but little, even when she surrenders herself entirely to love ; and in this she is right. For what great thing can she do to repay so precious a love—but a little grain of dust—how with all her powers can she love in return the supreme Majesty, who has been beforehand with love, and shown Himself entirely devoted to the work of her salvation ? " [1]

Entirely consecrated to the Lord, her soul is completely under the domination of the Spouse, He who " draws all things to Himself," " draws her to Him. *Omnia traham ad meipsum.*[2] The Word possesses her entirely, directs everything in her, " *Omnia subjecisti subpedibus ejus :* He reigns in her as the adored Master, as Sovereign whose power is uncontested, as Supreme Lover, whose love conquers everything ; reigns over all the desires of her heart, reigns alone, because she only seeks always and in all things His good pleasure : " I do always the things that please Him " : *Quae placita sunt ei facio semper.*[3]

The soul can then really appropriate to

[1] *Traité de l'amour de Dieu.* Chap. V (*Traduction nouvelle* par H. M. Delsart, p. 39.)

[2] *John* XII, 32.

[3] *Ibid.* VIII, 29.

herself the words of the Apostle: "I live, now not I but Christ liveth in me": "*Vivo autem jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus.*[1] "Christ is her life, and to die is gain,[2] because then the hour will sound when the soul will be always united to Him who is her all in all."

Far from being vanquished in love, the Spouse remains always first and foremost. He shows Himself to the soul full of tenderness, repeats those words which are the adequate expression of His love: "All my things are thine, and thine are Mine"; *Mea omnia tua sunt, et tua mea sunt.*[3] The bounty of the divine Spouse equals His tenderness; He brings to His bride to sustain, adorn and beautify her, the price of His sufferings, the riches of His merits, the nobility and wealth of His divinity.

In this happy state that promise of the Psalmist is accomplished in the virgin: "The Lord ruleth me, I shall want nothing." *Dominus regit me et nihil mihi deerit.*[4] She proves the realisation of the prayer addressed to God in the Pontifical for the consecration

[1] *Gal.* II, 20.
[2] *Phil.* I, 21.
[3] *John* XVII, 10.
[4] *Ps.* XXII, 1.

of virgins, at the moment when the solemn promises are exchanged: "Be to her, O Lord, honour, joy and delight. Grant her comfort in sadness, light in doubt, protection in injustice; give her patience in tribulation, abundance in poverty; in fasting be her food and beverage, in illness her remedy and cure. May she find all things in Thee who desires to love Thee above all": [1] *In te habeat omnia quem diligere appetat super omnia.*

[1] Pontifical for the consecration of virgins.

VI.

MEANS OF UNION WITH THE SPOUSE

SUMMARY.—Means given to the Religious by her Divine Spouse to strengthen her union with him—Above all, the Word gives Himself in Communion—How Communion aids the Religious to fulfil her duties and to realise her position of Spouse—The Sacred Humanity of Jesus conducts to the source of beatitude, the Divinity of the Word.

A condition of union so sublime, a state so elevated can only be maintained by special assistance granted to the soul. The Spouse Himself gives this assistance.

What does He do to a soul which He has chosen from all eternity to be entirely His? In the great majority of cases "He leads her into solitude to speak to her heart": *Ducam eam in solitudinem et loquar ad cor ejus.*[1] Just as a vineyard is enclosed with a hedge to protect it, so the Spouse encloses that soul in the cloister "in the clefts of the

[1] *Hos.* II, 14.

rocks": *in foraminibus petrae*;[1] the mysterious sepulchre which becomes the cradle of life; He hides her "in the secret of His face"; *in abscondito faciei suae*[2]: He makes her dwell in silence, so that she may be recollected, may hear His voice more easily, may please Him alone.[3] He gives the Rule which at each instant shows His will; for light, the Holy Scriptures, which recount His history and reveal His love; He gives the Church for Mother. He confides to her His praises so that "her voice sounds sweet in His ears": *Sonet vox tua in auribus meis, vox enim tua dulcis;*[4] He makes her live again the cycle of His mysteries, and by His sacraments gives her sovereign power. Such are the means by which the Spouse establishes safeguards, maintains and augments the love and fidelity of His elect.

[1] *Cantic.* II, 14.

[2] *Ps.* XXX, 21.

[3] "O holy soul, dwell in solitude so that you may keep yourself for Him who has so chosen you amongst all. . . . Do you not know that your Beloved is most sensitive, He will not make known to you the charm of His presence, when you are occupied with that of others. Put yourself in retreat, not of body only but of soul, a retreat of desire and devotion, in a manner wholly interior." St. Bernard, *In Cantica Sermo* XL, n. 4.

[4] *Cantic.* II, 14.

But, above all, the Word gives Himself in eucharistic communion. This banquet constitutes the union *par excellence*, because in it Christ is at the same time the Spouse, guest, and food. Communion is undoubtedly the means to enable the soul to realise as it should do the state of perfection necessary to be a spouse of the Word. We have previously said that the Religious, to give pleasure to her celestial Spouse, must detach herself both from creatures and from herself in order to zealously guard her virginal consecration. Now the Eucharist is "the corn of the elect and the wine bringing forth virgins": *Frumentum electorum, vinum germinans virgines*".[1] It is true that it is the soul that is primarily sanctified in communion, for the Eucharist is, before all, the food of the spiritual life. But in us, however, the union of soul and body is so close, there are between these two such intimate connection, that communion, in elevating the soul towards the summits of the spiritual life, appeases also the ardours of concupiscence and turns us from vain and sensible pleasures. More than once the Church, in the prayers for the post-communion, demands that this food shall make us "despise earthly and love celestial

[1] *Zach.* IX, 17.

pleasures."[1] In stimulating heavenly love, Communion strengthens in us the resolution to put away whatever could hinder the service of the Spouse.[2]

Are not these the strengthening and vivifying effects of Communion, which the Church extols in the Office for the Feast of St. Agnes: "His body is united with mine; His blood adorns my lips, His love renders me chaste; His touch purifies me; His coming secures my virginity"; *Cum amavero casta sum, cum tetigero munda sum, cum accepero virgo sum.*[3] Above all, Communion makes the soul "adhere to the Word." This is one of its main fruits. Has not Our Saviour said Himself:

[1] Sunday II Advent and IV after Epiphany: *Munera tua nos Deus a delectationibus terrenis expediant.*

[2] For the further development of the ideas in this Conference we would refer our readers to the Conference, *The Bread of Life* in our other volume, *Christ the Life of the Soul.* See also the penetrating and beautiful articles published by D. Ryelandt in the *Revue Liturgique et Monastique* (VI, Year 1920–21) on *The Purifying Effect of the Eucharist*, *The Eucharist and Charity*, *The Eucharist the Source of Moral Force.* Also by the same author the excellent brochure, *Pour mieux communier* (2nd edition, 1922), notably Chap. III: *Les Effets Vivifiants de l'Eucharistie.*

[3] *Third Responsory at Matins.* It matters little that these words are not historic; the mere fact that the Church uses them sufficiently indicates her doctrine.

" He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in him " : *Qui manducat meam carnem et bibit meum sanguinem in me manet et ego in illo?* [1] What greater or more profound union can be imagined ? The word " remain," does it not indicate all that is stable and lasting ? And the intentional and willed reference to reciprocity (*IN ME manet et EGO IN ILLO*), does not this signify the mutual exchange of affection, promises and gifts ? Nothing can strengthen fidelity so much as Communion well made : the Religious there finds the secret of strength, energy and readiness to follow the divine Spouse. Is it not in observing the precepts that one dwells enfolded within the love of Christ ? : *Si praecepta mea servaveritis MANEBITIS in dilections mea.*[2]

The Eucharistic union in making the soul dwell in the love of the Word makes her live " by the Word," " for the Word." " As the living Father hath sent Me and I live by the Father ; he that eateth Me, the same also shall live by me."[3] Is it necessary to repeat ? The Word receives all things from the Father, the Father has life in Himself, He gives the

[1] *John* VI, 57.
[2] *John* XV, 10.
[3] *John* VI, 58.

Son, the Word also this plenitude of infinite life; but the Word became incarnate to give us this life.

He gives it to us at Baptism together with faith and grace, but above all He gives Himself more abundantly "*abundantius*" [1] at the Eucharistic banquet. He is the Bread of Life who gives life, who produces the fruits of life in such a manner that the soul living by Christ lives also for Him. In coming into the soul, Christ Jesus draws the soul strongly to Himself; He establishes between its thoughts, actions, desires and wishes and His own, such a union that if His action is not impeded he transforms her into Himself, just as the wood acquires the qualities of the fire that consumes it. This is what made St. Bernard say: "We are transformed into Christ when we are conformed to Him": *Transformamur cum conformemur*.

Such a state constitutes the summit of union.

When one really loves, one would be one with the person loved, and desires such close union that the loved one should be part of oneself.

Human love fails; the all-powerful divine Love fully realises this. After receiving Christ

[1] *John* X, 10.

in Communion, the Religious can say, like the spouse in the Canticle : " My beloved to Me and I to Him " : *Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi* [1] This is but, however, a pale reflection of the marvellous reality in Christ of the union between the Word and the sacred humanity.

Thus Communion, frequently and worthily received, necessarily establishes in the soul the reign of the Word : *Verbo se regere*. Christ dwells in us to make us act in all things by Him, in the light of His truth, the guidance of His wisdom, by the impulses of His Spirit : there is at once, the secret and the supreme fruit of perfect union.[2]

Without doubt it is the body and blood of Christ that we receive, but is not the human

[1] *Cantic.* II, 16.—Read on this subject the beautiful and inspiring pages of Bossuet : *Méditations sur l'évangile. La Cène* XXIVe jour. (Ed. Marbeau, pp. 502–506).

[2] After what we have written about the marvellous effects which Holy Communion produces in those souls espoused to the Word by the vows of religion, one must not be astonished that in the mystical order it plays a " sensible rôle in the realisation of spiritual marriage. It is most often during eucharistic Communion that the Word celebrates with the soul divine marriage, and seals this contract in a sensible and tangible manner. The sacramental union thus becomes the means and the symbol of an intimate and indissoluble alliance." Mgr. Farges, *Les Phénomènes Mystiques*, p. 230.

nature of Jesus, the way by means of which we go to the Word ? The Word is the essential splendour and the unlimited radiance of the glory of the Father " *Splendor gloriae* "[1] for us it would be impossible to sustain the infinite glory of this majesty : the Word is also " a furnace of love whose ardours we could not support."[2]

What means has He then chosen to come to us, to give and unite Himself to us ? He has veiled His glory beneath a human nature so that our weak eyes and timorous hearts could approach and find in Him salvation and life. Is not this as the spouse says in the Canticle ? ' I sat under His shadow, whom I desired " : *Sub umbra illius quem desideraveram sedi.*[3] This shadow is the sacred humanity of Christ, the soul takes refuge under this shadow, which at the same time hides and reveals ; there it is enabled to contemplate the Word, to approach, enter into contact, and to rejoice with Him. More than once during the liturgical year, the Church puts on our lips the words, " May the human nature of your only Son, O Lord, come to our help " : *Unigeniti*

[1] *Cf. Heb.* I, 3.
[2] *Cf. Isaiah* XXXIII, 14.
[3] *Cantic.* II, 3.

tui Domine, nobis succurrat humanitas." [1] How necessary is this assistance for that soul which desires to enter that sanctuary of intimacy with the Word. The humanity of Jesus leads us to the Word, and by Him we enter " the bosom of the Father " : *In sinu Patris.*[2] By faith and love the soul penetrates into these eternal splendours. Once introduced into this Holy of Holies, the natural abode of her divine Spouse, the soul may give free vent to her effusions of love ; using a holy boldness yet full of reverence, she may express to the Spouse, her desire to be inebriated with his delights : *Osculetur me osculo oris sui.*[3] Her confidence will be recompensed : she will receive from the Spouse the most intimate and consoling favours " for the fruit of his love is full of sweetness " : *Et fructus ejus dulcis gutturi meo.*[4]

[1] Secreta in Missa Visitationis et Nativitatis B.M.V.
[2] *John* I, 18.
[3] *Cantic.* I, 1.
[4] *Ibid.* II, 3.

VII.

THE ADMIRABLE FECUNDITY OF A SPOUSE OF THE WORD.

SUMMARY.—St. Bernard indicates fruitfulness as the highest perfection of a Spouse of the Word—How wonderful is the fecundity of a Religious united to Christ—Her influence extends over the whole Church—Final exhortation : the call to the life of union, the prelude to the eternal marriage feast of the Lamb.

When a soul utilises with fervour, the many and wonderful means that Our Lord daily puts at her disposal to draw Her to Himself, when she unites herself daily to Christ in dispositions of faith, confidence and generous love, then she produces much fruit, and attains that supernatural fecundity that St. Bernard indicates as the final perfection of the spouse : " To conceive by the Word what she should bring forth." *De verbo concipere quod pariat Verbo.*

What do these words mean ? " To conceive by the Word," is to undertake all

things helped by His grace and with the impulse of His love, "to bring forth for the Word" is to produce works for His glory.

Yes, it is precisely there that the special work of the Religious is found. Detached from creatures, detached from herself, living united to the Word, allowing herself to be directed in all things by Him, then there is nothing in her, neither thought, sentiment, desire, wish or action, which does not spring from Him and depend on His grace and love. From this arises the fruitfulness of the spouse; for "he that abideth in Me," said Jesus, "and I in him, the same beareth much fruit": *Qui manet in me, et ego in eo, hic fert fructum multum.*[1]

It is necessary to conceive "by the Word." Let us not forget that this union with the Word is of the divine order, both by its bond of union and origin; no natural force, no human industry could realise it in us. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," said St. John. That is to say, whatever is derived solely from nature or reason remains in the purely natural order. "The flesh profiteth nothing"; it cannot attain that position worthy of the dignity of the Word, and remains without

[1] *John* XV, 5.

supernatural fecundity: *Quod natum est ex carne caro est*[1] *caro non prodest quidquam.*[2]

What is it, then, which supernaturalises our actions, gives them life, and makes them glorify God? It is the Holy Spirit. *Quod natum est ex Spiritu, Spiritus est*[3] and the Spirit alone vivifies, *Spiritus est qui vivicat.*[4] But how does the Spirit unite us to the Word? By grace and charity. He instils into our hearts the charity of God,"[5] and by His action we conceive by the Word. It was by the Spirit that Christ was conceived in the Virgin's womb; and it is by the Spirit, by His grace and love that the fruitfulness of all our work results. You well know that the necessary elements of supernatural fruitfulness are sanctifying grace and purity of intention; these are derived from the love that the soul bears for her Spouse, and stimulate her desire to "please Him in all things": *Quae placita sunt ei facio semper.*

Again, how admirable is this fecundity; it is much more wonderful than that of earthly

[1] *John.* III, 6.
[2] *Ibid.* VI, 64.
[3] *Ibid.* III, 6.
[4] *Ibid.* VI, 64.
[5] *Cf. Rom.* V, 5.

unions. In the case of a virgin soul united to Christ, each supernatural work, each act of virtue, enriches the treasury of grace and glory, and at the same time augments her merits and her beauty. Such a soul "goes from virtue to virtue,"[1] and unceasing are her interior elevations, as she approaches nearer and nearer to the time of the eternal nuptials. Her beauty also grows in measure as she nears the divine source of all perfection; it is impossible to describe her splendour; this ravishes even the Spouse Himself: "How beautiful art thou, my love": *quam pulchra es*.[2] He seeks for this beauty: "Show me thy face, my well-beloved": *Ostende mihi faciem tuam*, "for thy face is comely": *Facies tua decora*.[3] "Thy stature is like a palm tree, and I said I will go up into the palm tree and take hold of the fruit thereof."[4] I will delight in those virtues whose source is my grace. St. Catharine of Siena one day had a vision of a soul which after sin had been renovated by sanctifying grace, and she declared to Blessed Raymond that she was utterly unable to describe the beauty of this soul. What shall we

[1] *Ps.* LXXXIII, 8.
[2] *Cantic.* IV, 1.
[3] *Ibid.* II, 14.
[4] *Ibid.* VII, 7, 8.

say, then, of the virgin consecrated to Christ, whose whole life is bathed in the rays of the Son of Justice, whose path is always guided by eternal Wisdom, the Divine Word? The angels alone are capable of fully admiring her: "Who is this that cometh up from the desert . . . from the desert of her native poverty . . . who mounts like a column of smoke exhaling myrrh, incense, and all perfumes; flowing with delight, because she is supported by her Beloved": *Deliciis affluens, innixa super dilectum SUUM.*[1]

But all these riches, all this splendour, the soul brings back to the Spouse who is their source: *Parit Verbo.* Living in the truth illumined by wisdom, she knows that the Spouse works within her; full of humility like the Blessed Virgin who conceived the Divine Word in her immaculate womb, the Spouse makes redound to the glory of God all she has received from Him, all that by His grace and love she has conceived through Him. "My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour": *Magnificat anima mea Dominum.*[2]

The soul may rejoice not only at the works

[1] *Cantic.* VIII. 5.
[2] *Luke* I, 46.

operated in her by Christ, but her life of union with Jesus extends its influence far beyond "the garden enclosed" where the Spouse has placed her—it extends over the entire Church.

Our Lord enlightened St. Catharine of Siena on this point: "O how sweet is this dwelling (of the soul in the Word), this perfect union of the soul with Me is beyond all other delights. The will is no longer an intermediary between the soul and Myself, seeing that it has become one with Me." Then, as if having laid down the principle, He comes to the conclusion and adds: "Like a perfume, the fruit of her humble prayers spreads all over the world. The incense of her desire mounts towards me in its incessant supplication for the salvation of souls. It is a voice which without human words cries continually before My Divine Majesty." [1]

We who live by faith, shall we be astonished at such wide-spreading power? Is not God the sole guardian of souls, the sole supporter of the edifice of the Church? Is it not the Word who holds in His hands the eternal destinies of souls? Is He not for every man coming into this world, the only way, the sole truth, the true life? But what credit, what

[1] *Dialogue, traité des larmes,* Chap. IX, Traduct. Hurtaud, p. 347, 348.

power that soul enjoys which is wholly given up to Him? She is all-powerful with her divine Spouse, because she knows the ways of approach to His divine Heart: and her whole life is a constant appeal for the graces and benedictions of God in favour of His people.[1]

Already we see in the Old Testament the power of holy souls with God. In the time of Abraham, the presence of ten just men in Sodom would have been sufficient to spare that terribly guilty city.[2]

On Sinai the prayer of Moses alone saved the people from the strokes of divine justice. Moses has just received the tables of the Law on the mountain; he is on the point of descending to the camp of the Israelites. God then reveals to him the iniquity of the people, who have aroused His anger by idolatry: "Let me alone," says the Lord, "that My wrath may be kindled against them": *Dimitte me!* Leave me alone! God, as it were, seems to fear that the supplication of Moses will drag from Him a pardon. And this is precisely

[1] This apostolic zeal for the glory of the Spouse and the sanctification of souls, in the entirely mystic order, is one of the principal effects of divine marriage. St. Teresa has insisted on this in particularly clear language. See *The Interior Castle*: *7th Dwelling*, Chap. IV.

[2] *Gen.* XVIII, 32.

what happened. Moses stretches forth his hands for the Israelites, reminds God of His promises, and implores Him not to give vent to His wrath. The sacred text then adds: "The Lord was appeased from doing the evil which He had spoken against His people": *Placatusque est Dominus*.[1] Moses had saved the guilty. In this mysterious struggle he had triumphed over the Divine resistance because he was pleasing to God, who talked to him "as a man is wont to talk to his friend."[2]

If it was thus under the law of fear, what will it be under the law of love when, through the Incarnation, the members of Christ's mystic body are thus united so closely together?

Even though a virginal soul be not called to exterior work by her vocation and dwells in solitude on the mountain, yet she remains always the "fountain sealed up"[3] belonging to the Spouse, yet such a soul leading a life of pure union exercises great influence in the supernatural world. Have we not, as the witnesses of the fecundity of such lives, St. Gertrude, St. Catharine, St. Teresa? Because their wills were entirely united to Christ, the

[1] *Exod.* XXXII, 7–14.
[2] *Ibid.* XXXIII, 11.
[3] *Cantic.* IV, 12.

Divine Spouse granted their desires : *Voluntatem timentium se faciet.*[1]

We know with what infinite condescension Our Lord was pleased to grant the prayers of St. Gertrude, conferring on her a species of sovereign power : " I heap up in your soul as a treasure the riches of my grace so that each may find in you what he searches for. You shall be like the spouse who knows the secrets of her husband, having lived so long with him as to divine his wishes." [2]

Here is to be found one of the deeper aspects of the dogma of the Communion of Saints. The closer one of these privileged souls is to

[1] *Ps.* CXLIV, 19.

[2] *The Herald of Divine Love*, L. I, Chap. XVII : One day Christ said to St. Gertrude, " Give Me thy heart." The Saint offered it with joy, and it seemed to her that God filled it with the effusions of the divine bounty. Christ then said : " Henceforth I shall take pleasure in making use of your heart. It will be the channel conveying the streams of divine consolation from my Sacred Heart to all those who shall have recourse to you in faith and humility " (*Ibid.* L.III, Chap. LXVII. See also L.I, Chap. XIV, and above all, L. III, Chap. XXXIII.) The life of the great Benedictine shows how frequently she exercised her power in favour of those who had recourse to her. . . . Christ also said to St. Mechtilde : " Behold Me here, I put Myself in your power to do what you will. . . . I shall obey your commands." *Le Livre de la Grâce Spéciale.* L. II, Chap. XXXI.

God, the author and source of every good which can adorn and rejoice souls, the greater is her beneficent action on those around. What graces she can demand from the Spouse, wresting them from Him for the whole Church! How powerfully she can co-operate in the conversion of sinners, the perseverance of the just, the salvation of those agonising, the entrance of the holy and suffering souls into the bliss of heaven! What a wonderful fruitfulness is hers! The fecundity of nature is limited; hers is unlimited. It is as a radiance emanating from her soul; those who approach her are embalmed "in the good odour of Christ;" [1] there is, as it were, a divine virtue which goes out from her to touch souls, obtain their pardon, console, strengthen, raise, tranquilise, gladden, and make them show forth the glory of her Spouse. In fact, it is the Word who lives in her, and always living is never inactive, for His action is love, by which He enlightens, vivifies and saves souls. She is a true co-operator in the redemption. The extent of her actions, of her fecundity, cannot be measured. Their action resembles the snow which, covering the heights, is melted by the warm rays of the sun,

[1] *II Cor.* II, 15.

and descends in life-giving streams to fertilise the valleys and plains.

Without doubt God alone knows the powers of action of the soul He has chosen. Those unillumined by faith understand nothing of these invisible realities; they imagine that such souls separated from the world are inactive and sterile for God's work, and their preference is all for those who devote themselves to external and tangible works. Certainly such works are necessary, indispensable, clearly willed by Heaven, and required by the Church. But what gives their fecundity? God alone. "I have planted," writes St. Paul, "another has watered the plant, but it is God who gives the increase": *Deus incrementium dedit*,[1] and again, "Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it."[2]

As a general rule in God's providential order, this growth is caused by ardent prayer and a pure life; and was it not this special intention that St. Teresa proposed to her daughters in founding her various Carmels? When, then, you really live this life of union with the Word, a life which is the definite end and motive of your vocation, how much you

[1] Cf. *I Cor.* III, 6.

[2] *Ps.* CXXVI, 1.

can do for the salvation and sanctification of souls! . . . If this is true for one virginal soul, wholly given up to the goodwill of her Spouse, what a supernatural power does a monastery possess, where all the members live in a generous and continual forgetfulness of themselves, in a donation of their whole life to God, and in continuous union with Jesus Christ? Such an assembly possesses an incalculable power in the world of souls. And what a fruitful source of light and grace it is for the Church of Christ! What a cause of joy to the heart of the Spouse! What a pure glory it brings to the Father. . . .[1]

[1] "The Church has raised in the state of virginity a holy mountain, a mountain which accumulates grace, a mountain where it pleases God to dwell: *Mons . . . in quo bene placitum est Deo habitare in eo.* It is there that are poured out the gifts that are given to Christian society to strengthen it in the continual struggle of good against evil; there it is that the continual *miserere* is heard, which arrests in their path the Divine punishments. Without these virginal prayers society would be continually visited by the Divine Justice." Monsabré *Conférences à Notre-Dame*, Carême, 1887. . . . St. Gregory pictures the virgin religious at Rome protecting the city, as it were, for several years against the invasion, of the Lombards. *Harum talis vita est atque in tantum lacrimis et abstinentia districta, ut credamus quia, si ipsae non essent, nullus nostrum per tot annos in loco hoc subsistere inter Longobardorum gladios potuissent* (*Epistol.* 26, lib. VII.)

Let us then live in these verities. Each must have a keen and continual desire to attain to this blessed state, and so participate in the ardent zeal which animates the heart of the Word incarnate for the glory of the Father and the sanctification of souls. Let us seek to realise this ideal, an elevated one without doubt, but one which is the natural, normal and also obligatory term of our vocation. Do not content yourselves with being correct religious keeping exact exterior observances; that, without doubt, is necessary and indispensable, but yet is only the husk of the religious life. Do not limit yourselves to being simply pious souls, with limited ambitions easily satisfied: such an existence will not respond to God's special love manifested in your vocation, neither to the grandeur of the promises you have made, the height of the duties demanded of a spouse, or the abundance of the favours lavished upon you. Aspire, then, without ceasing, with the help of grace, by a life of humility and humble devotion, to attain the height of that intimate union Our Lord wishes to contract with your souls: there is nothing which can please His Sacred Heart more.

If you strive to live this life of union, you will realise to the full the sublimity of your

vocation, you will attain the supreme goal of the religious life. Thus prepared, the soul can await undismayed "in the middle of the night," the cry announcing the Spouse. "Behold the Bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet him."[1] Or, rather, it is the Bridegroom Himself whose voice you will hear: "Arise, come quickly, come from Libanus, my spouse, come, thou shalt be crowned": *Veni sponsa mea, veni de Libano, veni, coronaberis;*[2] "Come, for the winter is now past, the rain is over and gone, the time of singing has arrived,"[3] the time for the chants of eternity. . . . The virgins alone can chant these, enjoy their

[1] *Matt.* XXV. 6.

[2] *Cantic.* IV, 8.—Here is how Our Lord told St. Mechtilde that virgins were received in Heaven. 'As soon as the news has resounded, Behold, here is a virgin! all the powers of Heaven rejoice. . . . I Myself hasten to rise and meet her, calling her by these words, 'Come, My friend, come, My spouse, come to receive the crown.' And My voice is then of such amplitude that it resounds through the length and breadth of heaven. . . . Arrived in My presence, the bride regards herself in My eyes as in a mirror. We contemplate each other with ravishment. Then in a loving embrace I imprint, fill and penetrate her wholly with My Divinity." (*Le Livre de la Grâce Spéciale*, I, II, Chap. XXXVI.)

[3] *Cantic.* II, 11, 12.

inexhaustible and mysterious sweetness [1] and the inexpressible delights that are reserved for them : thus it is that having quitted all things to follow Christ alone, with a virginal love, unique, undivided, and without reserve, they have acquired that incommunicable privilege to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth." *Quocumque ierit. . . .*[2]

And the Spirit and the Bride say : come.[3]

[1] *Et nemo poterat dicere canticum nisi . . . qui empti sunt de terra . . . virgines enim sunt.* Apoc. XIV, 1–5. . . . *Gaudia virginum . . . a ceterorum omnium gaudiorum sorta distincta . . . Gaudia propria virginum Christi non sunt eadem non virginum, quamvis Christi.* (S. Augustin, *De Sancta Virginitate*, Chap. XXXVII, n. 27.)

[2] *Apoc.* XIV, 4.

[3] *Ibid.* XXII, 17.

GLORIA TIBI DOMINE

QUI NATUS ES DE VIRGINE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITOR'S PREFACE, P. .. .. VII.

I. THE CALL TO THE DIGNITY OF A SPOUSE OF CHRIST, p. ... ... 12.
Invitation of the soul to the nuptial banquet, p. 13.—Every baptised soul is a spouse of the Word, p. 16.—This condition specially manifest in consecrated souls, p. 17.—The amazing condescension revealed by this invitation, p. 18.—A doctrine founded on Scripture and the Liturgy, p. 20.—It has its source in love, p. 21.—How St. Bernard traces the portrait of a spouse of the Word, p. 22.

II.—THE HUMAN NATURE IN CHRIST, THE SPOUSE OF THE WORD, p. .. .. .. 25.
The inexpressible union between the Word and the human nature, p. 25.—The human nature in Christ has no personality in itself, p. 26.—With what power it adheres to the Word, p. 27.—It lives, for the Word, p. 28.—The Word reigns in it, p. 29.—The admirable fecundity of this union p. 30.—The Holy Ghost its artisan, p. 31.—This union is the type of that existing between consecrated souls and the Word, p. 31.

III. RELICTIS OMNIBUS, p. .. .. .. 33.
Detachment from all creatures the first necessity for the soul aspiring to the dignity of a spouse, p. 34.—Division of the soul caused by human

love, p. 34.—The divine fecundity, p. 35.—Human fecundity, p. 36.—Consecrated virginity an evangelical counsel, p. 38.—Why a necessity for union with the Word in the quality of spouse, p. 43.—How necessary it is to guard this vow with vigilance and humility, p. 43.—This detachment not contrary to love for our neighbour, examples of the Saints, p. 43.—Christ claims our love in the first place, p. 46.—Example of St. Gertrude. p. 47.

IV.—Votis Omnibus Verbo Adhaerere, p. .. 49. To virginity love must be joined, the bond of union, p. 50.—The virgin must attach herself to her divine Spouse by a constant fidelity, p. 51.—Precaution to be taken against "the little foxes" which damage the vineyard, p. 56.—These noxious animals symbolise infidelities, p. 56.—Benedictions of which fidelity is the pledge, p. 58.

V.—Verbo Vivere, Verbo se Regere, p. .. 62. The third quality of the spouse: to live for the Word, p. 62.—This life is summed up in fervour and devotion, p. 63.—Love is the support of this life, the transformation it produces, p. 64.—The reign of the Word in the soul, p. 65.—The fruits which result for the Spouse, p. 67.

VI.—Means of Union given to the Spouse by the Word, p. .. .. .. 70. Abundance of these means, p. 70.—The Word above all gives himself in eucharistic communion, p. 72.—How communion helps the virgin to fulfil her duties and realise her condition of spouse,

p. 73.—The sacred humanity of Christ conducts to the Divinity of the Word, the source of beatitude, p. 77.

VII.—Admirable Fecundity of a Spouse of the Word, p. .. .. 79.
St. Bernard indicates fecundity as the culminating perfection of a spouse of the Word, p. 79.—How wonderful this fecundity is, p. 82.—It radiates throughout the entire Church, p. 83.—Final exhortation to the life of union the prelude of marriage with the Lamb, p. 91.

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